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SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's September Column – This Month, and Every Month, Take a Moment to Show Veterans You Care!

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month—a time to raise awareness and connect individuals to treatment services.

Mental health conditions can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, or background. The truth is, we can all benefit from honest conversations about mental health conditions. Just like physical health, mental health is important at every stage of life and is essential to your overall well-being.

Although veterans can often recognize when to treat their physical injuries, it can be harder for them to identify mental health or readjustment challenges. Some veterans, or their loved ones, may notice symptoms and experiences affecting their lives but aren't sure what to do about them. Others may think nothing can be done or may have concerns about the impact of treatment.

For almost every mental health condition, there are several effective treatments that can help veterans cope with symptoms and greatly improve quality of life. Treatment can help veterans understand their condition and change how they think about it, in part by identifying steps to improve their response to emotional triggers, stressful situations, and other challenges in their life.

It's never too late for soldiers to get treatment or support for the challenges they face, whether they just returned from a deployment, were stateside during their whole time in service, or have been home for 40 years. Even veterans who didn't realize they were dealing with a mental health condition for many years can improve their lives with treatment. Recovering from a mental health challenge is a process that involves hope, action, problem-solving, and tapping into or building up a support system — in addition to close guidance from a trained professional.

Veterans, to find resources nearest you, visit: <https://www.maketheconnection.net/resources>.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs